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FrontLine Supervisor

UT Employee Assistance Program • (800) 346-3549

■ **The faster the technology becomes, the higher the expectations become for shorter deadlines, more communication, and anxiety about competition. The problem is that humans can only take on so much. How do I avoid burnout? Maybe I am the type that can't handle the pressure.**

■ **What are the most common complaints about bosses?**

■ **How do I get an employee to do something that is part of the job when he or she doesn't want to do it and refuses to do it? By the way, termination is**

Burnout is often linked to the work culture, where jobs have become more demanding and everyone faces more pressure to respond and dedicate increasing amounts of time and emotional energy to the job. This means you are expending more effort and using more mental resources (focus) to accomplish work goals. Don't fall for the myth that burnout happens only to employees who can't handle job pressure or monotony. The way to fight burnout is to be thinking upstream, anticipating its possibility, and being on the lookout for symptoms. An example might be waking up in the morning and having an empty or an "I hate this job" feeling. Remaining passive will only allow the intensity of this feeling to grow. The EAP will help you find one or two behaviors that are contributing to burnout (your response to work pressure contributes to it) and one or two new behaviors you can practice to overcome it.

Common complaints from employees about supervisors include being micromanaged, not listening to me, not being tolerant of a different opinion, not following through on promises, giving deadlines that are unrealistic and that put too much pressure on me, not having enough time to talk to me, not giving me enough feedback about my performance, and he/she is too disorganized. Except for one issue, the denominator among these complaints is communication. Only "being disorganized" stands alone. Earlier communication, communicating one's concerns to the supervisor, being more receptive in interpersonal communication, and asking for more communication from either party would resolve these complaints. Are you able to see how your role in encouraging, seeking out, expecting, and holding employees and yourself accountable for effective communication can create a more harmonious workplace?

You're hobbled without credible authority in this situation. Refusal to work is usually enabled by a perceived lack of consequences. So the real problem is lack of leverage or influence in the employment relationship. The proof is that the employee is calling the shots. Your focus for a solution should begin here. Is it fair that you should have to manipulate or sweet-talk your employee into doing the job? Meet with

not an option. Can the EAP motivate this person?

your supervisor and next-level manager. Discuss the situation. You may be surprised at how a discussion among you three produces a dramatic shift in manner, approach, and resolve in dealing with the insubordination. You can then clarify the organization's expectations (not just yours) with the employee. The EAP has a definite role in addressing underlying issues of your employee's behavior, but it is recommended that you first reassert the realistic nature of the employment relationship in unison with your superiors.

■ After a traumatic incident, what can supervisors do to play a helpful role in supporting employees? We aren't counselors, but employees look to us for direction and strength, so we can't be unmindful of our role.

Employees do naturally turn to supervisors during a crisis. Some may rely upon the supervisor as a leader for direction and guidance, some may vent anger toward them (e.g., "OK, you're in charge, so now what?"), and others may seek a closer relationship, venting feelings and seeking empathy and a stronger bond as the wall of formality and detachment momentarily falls. Some may treat the supervisor like a parent. Recognize that these and many more are normal responses following critical incidents. You should not counsel employees, but be accepting of different reactions. Be alert to more extreme reactions that signal a need for EAP support, and coordinate with the EAP how to best employ its services with your group. Plain visibility and presence have their own healing effect, so "be" with employees as much as possible. After an incident, employees want information, so keep it flowing. It reduces anxiety dramatically. Finally, ask the EAP about tips for taking care of you.

■ I hope to be with my employer until retirement, but frankly, I am no longer thrilled with what I do. I am bordering on not wanting to come to work. How can I make my job more meaningful and not allow my attitude to affect employees?

Two key dimensions of your job include "what you are doing" and "who you are doing it with." Your job and duties may be static and inflexible, but your relationships are not. Don't let these relationships suffer, because enhancing them is the answer to your problem and you are at an advantage for doing it. Greet employees every day and enhance the people dimension of your work. Encourage employees when they are having rough days and steer employees toward their potential. Discover how you can elevate their lot with mentoring and opportunities. See the book "*Why Motivating People Doesn't Work (And What Does)*," which was just released in September 2014. You'll discover powerful insights and new ways of engaging with employees that may help you leap out of bed in the morning. Also, talk to the EAP. Together you will discover more ways to put meaning in your job.

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